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**Tanzania's 'new generation':
the power and tragedy of a concept**

Age is commonly treated in social research as an independent variable. But once we categorize age, particularly in terms of generations, we appear to be dealing with a construct. Cultural convention distinguishes young and old. Both members and non-members of an age cohort (re)produce a 'generation': they determine who belongs to it, what an older or younger generation means in terms of social status, power, values and so on, and the significance, if any, of generations in that society. This chapter considers the special case of people consciously redefining the construct and pursuing an active version of generation. Ethnicity and women's emancipation are two examples in which one may assert one's rights by attributing group-like features to one category of independent variable (respectively descent and gender). Given these two classic examples, can we not imagine the same thing happening with a third primary variable, age categorized in terms of generation?

This chapter illustrates how young Tanzanians indeed use age in claiming to form a 'new generation' (*kizazi kipya*) and thus assert their rights as a group. Age itself is less important here than offering the prospect of a new future for society as a whole. In this chapter I draw on long-standing ethnography of a Sukuma village community and on the lyrics of the country's famous *Bongo Flava* music, a style of hip hop sung in the national language of Swahili and highly popular due to its considerable exposure in street life and on radio programmes.¹ Originating from the secluded arena of youth culture, it is now affecting the whole of Tanzania's informal system of politics (Stroeken 2005). Hip hop music directs criticism against the political and sexual hypocrisy of the country's rulers. In speaking of a new generation, I argue, the young

¹ I am indebted to Kulwa Munyeti for his help in translating and interpreting the lyrics. Warm thanks also go to Ndaki Munyeti, Peter Nyanda and the many friends in Misungwi who provided additional feedback. The chapter has benefited greatly from the comments of Susan Reynolds Whyte and George Mertens. I conducted the study as a postdoctoral researcher at the Fund for Scientific Research in Flanders, which also funded my follow-up in Mwanza from December 2002 to January 2003.

rappers and their peers are doing two things. First, they are describing society's moral impasse, while suggesting a possible change for the better. Secondly, they are themselves contributing to this change by rendering the attitude of the soon-to-be old generation unattractive. Using the generation concept, the rappers can depict an emancipatory process, one that is arising at the expense of the allegedly corrupt parental generation that is ruling the country and 'eating the future'. The older, grandparental generation may nonetheless benefit from the slipstream of youth protest, provided they sacrifice the privileges of the elderly patron (*mzee*) and become *dingi*, something between a wise elder and a village idiot.

This dialectic of contestation significantly differs from the intergenerational negotiations over succession and power that have marked African history. The emancipating potential comes from the generation concept being wedded to the notion of the new. The negotiations of the young are now oriented to a linear dialectic of progress rather than the pacifying and cyclical reciprocity of generations within the clan. What we are dealing with is a breach in which generations of kin define themselves more and more as historical generations. This transformation has a tragic aspect, which the artist's eye may be better calibrated to depict than the ethnographer's. The latter celebrates the cultural plurality of modernities: the hip hop artist identifies threats to well-being. We discover why a presumed conflict or gap between young and old has become one of the main metaphors in Africa in conceiving of social change under modernity. I will also demonstrate, however, that *Bongo Flava* represents a unique way of renewing the intergenerational bond.

The generation gap and the world community

Who dares to speak of a generation gap these days? A series of surveys have demonstrated that intergenerational differences in norms, values and social practices have diminished steadily in the US since the pivotal 1960s, partly due to a mutual rapprochement of progressive and conservative standpoints (Smith 2000). Along with this decline since the early 1970s, scholarly interest in the topic – the number of related publications and so on – quickly waned (*ibid.*). Fifty years later, however, interest in the theme of intergenerational relations is waxing again, as it did about a century ago in the work of Freud and his contemporaries, who introduced a father figure and a mother figure in an imaginary family

dealing with supposedly universal tensions and desires. Today attention has shifted to cross-cultural gerontology, that is, the various social contexts of intra-family exchange.

Africa's struggle with macro-economic pressures, income disparities, culturally insensitive education and the AIDS pandemic has become reflected in highly strained intergenerational relations. Principles of authority, solidarity, duty and reciprocity between grandparents, parents and children are not just being transformed. In many cases – the archetypical image is a South African shanty town ruled by gangs – the principles have become obsolete. Old age has lost its connotations of maturity and status, with young people radically redefining the conditions for them by exploiting the democratic potential of monetisation. Anyone making money has capital to make gifts and forge partnerships. 'Social techniques' (Van der Geest 2002) have been developed by elderly Africans to withstand the tide. Examples are an assertive type of complaint discourse among Xhosa, a form of pretence between Akan elderly and their carers, a hopeful revival of remembrance and life-history narrative in Namaqualand, a revaluation of traditional knowledge and of the grandmother's educational role among Zulu, and the retrieval of lost elderhood status during funerals in Kenya (Makoni and Stroeken 2002). As the bond between tradition and well-being is severed, perhaps across the continent at large, room is provided for the young and the old to redefine themselves, with all the ambiguity of compulsory autonomy. In this chapter I will show how Tanzanian rappers portray the African urban reality in what could be called 'aphro-modern' terms. A deep desire exists for both modernity and tradition, yet focusing respectively on what cannot be obtained and on what has been deserted for good.

Speculations on baby-boomers (1945-1964), generation X (born after 1964) and sub-variants never really left the popular media in the West. There is a reason for the academic's reticence. Serious reference to a 'new generation' sounds like 1960s utopian discourse. Moreover, the idea of an age cohort with more or less shared life conditions is far from evident to an anthropologist, especially when that cohort is supposed to have a culture of its own, if not a collective consciousness, transcending the limits of one society. This is nevertheless what Margaret Mead, who coined the term 'generation gap', argued in her much neglected essay of 1970. To those claiming that the generation gap has always existed, she insisted on the unique cultural conditions needed for such a gap to

emerge: 'The primary evidence that our present situation is unique, without any parallel in the past, is that the generation gap is world wide. The particular events taking place in any country – China, England, Pakistan, Japan, the United States, New Guinea, or elsewhere – are not enough to explain the unrest that is stirring modern youth everywhere' (1970: 52). Mead hinted at the remarkable formation of a cross-cultural generation. The key event, according to her, was the emergence of what she called a world community. 'For the first time human beings throughout the world, in their information about one another and responses to one another, have become a community that is united by shared knowledge and *danger*' (Mead 1970: 54, her emphasis). The intergenerational difference took the shape of a mood, a sense of urgency to act, which was shared across nations. Rather than particular ideas, it was the paths and velocities by which these travelled that were crucial, as they could account for the intensity of belief in those ideas. What Mead observed in the rise of a world community back then was the birth of what would logically be the first *world generation*. A world generation is a global historical generation. The first was that of people world-wide who were in their prime during decolonisation in the 1960s. Has the first world generation been succeeded in the meanwhile by a second one, consisting of those who were at their prime during the neo-liberal turn in the 1980s? And is a third world generation emerging at present? Tanzanian hip hop songs indirectly share Mead's analysis. When the songs mention 'the world' and what is happening to it, they indeed deal with that world community, rather than with some localized version of the world. The songs appear to unravel the succession of world generations since decolonisation, without, however, claiming any increase in global cultural cohesion. Their main purpose is to depict a third world generation.

The young Sukuma, who visits Mwanza town, discovers rap music and hangs a poster in his room which warns stridently, 'Beware, you have entered the ghetto!' is 'digging' the music and the poster, rather than reviving through it the *habitus* of the dancer in Sukuma culture. This emotive basis of practice crucially refutes the culturalist presumption that the rapper's style would appear to the Sukuma peasant as something alien, something to be re-interpreted and locally appropriated. Like any youth from the US to Japan and Brazil, this Sukuma youngster has joined the 'ghetto' and is contributing to its cultural meaning, which no single

adept alone incarnates. People observe how their histories synchronize with one another, no less than those of the colonizer and the colonized did, more destructively. Of course, the colonized transformed the colonizer too in the interaction between the local and the global which has never ceased (see Appadurai 2001; Moore and Sanders 2001). But the paradigm of symbolic influence offers only one side of the story: the other side is experiential confluence. The rebellion in the 1960s of French and American students, labour strikes, English rock bands, Black activists and African intellectuals originated in disparate histories, yet resembled each other simultaneously. It was only because there was no centre and, most of all, no direct influence between the histories of these groups that the recognition of each other's experiences could create a collective sense of timing and have the propulsive impact of a collective consciousness. Paraphrasing the anthem of Bantu spirit cults initiating sufferers from different cultures (Stroeken 2006), the ghetto – originally the cult – is always larger than expected.

Historical generations relate flexibly not only to culture, but also to age (as do generations of kin, as aunts can be younger than sisters). Kerouac and Leary are icons of the 1960s, even though they were much older than the activists associated with them. Strict identification with an age cohort obstructs the intended political mobilization linked to the term. My emphasis in the idea of generation, or in what has been 'generated' in a certain period, is a collective mood, contagious, moving rapidly through any channel of information, with a wide variety of cultural practices to match. It is not of the order of the symbol, but of the urge. Another word is 'spirit'. The spirit of an age may be symbolically void, a mere urge to oppose established ideas, as in the 'negative dialectics' of Adorno (1970). No culture or language is an obstacle, and very little is needed for it to trigger cross-cultural sympathy. The spirit of a generation needs only the analogue of a style, dress, sound or tone, some lyrics, an image combining age and facial expression in a fraction of a second, to be recognized and stir the observer. This is as true of the sense of connectivity and danger mentioned by Mead, who had the spectre of the atom bomb in mind, as it is for its equivalent today, such as viral forms of terror, working through grassroots contagion in the media and popular culture. Parallel to the building blocks of culture, in which edifices slowly rise or crumble, there is an experiential reality, one of how people feel, a more rhizomic reality where the tiniest expression can suffice to root the

plant. Mead's hypothesis of a world community points to this experiential overlay which people can share, despite cultural differences.

Uncovering the *Zeitgeist*, the Spirit of the Age, seems presumptuous. We would not want to repeat Heidegger's tendentious warning about the epochal idea behind modern technology. In the late 1970s, Foucault famously distanced himself from his own attempt to uncover the Western episteme. A consensus has grown up that the recording of something as expansive as 'the times' should be left to artists. Indeed, what better candidate to embody the spirit than the medium? Art captures the vibe. Tanzanian rap music, known as *Bongo Flava*, conveys in a recognizable urge the gap between the dominant code and one's inexpressible feeling of how things should be. The content of the latter may be limited to negative dialectics, such as an expression of discontent with the ruling generation of pragmatists, who earlier, with equal conviction, disparaged the idealism of their own predecessors. Music typically needs no more than this negative dialectic to reach an audience across cultural and linguistic borders, which filter out content. A clear-cut ideological project is not needed for members of a historical generation to co-develop. I suggest that one condition for forming world generations is that generations of kin define themselves as historical generations and approach history as a global process, possibly one with a logic of its own.

The dialectics of contestation: the third generation

The first time this research seemed compelling to me was in December 2002, when Mama Nyanda, the head of a local NGO, rephrased my interest in Tanzania's booming hip hop scene as an interest in Tanzania's *kizazi kipyaa*, literally 'the new generation'. She counted her son as one of its members. He is not a rap musician, but, as I understood it, the phrase 'the new generation' refers to an emerging mentality among educated youth in the face of the postcolonial predicament. Although I encountered the term in several rap songs, it was originally an outsider's description favoured by the Tanzanian media. The term was first applied to the widely popular hip hop music, known for its politically engaged Swahili lyrics. Protest songs aired on the radio and sold in the streets expose the neo-liberal politics dominating society, in particular the underlying combination of indifference and corruption that is sometimes accepted under the guise of survival pragmatics. *Kizazi kipyaa* stands for an unorganized, rhizomically budding counter-movement, warranting a ray

of optimism on the continent with the bleakest of prospects. It refers to a historical generation that links Tanzania to a global process and thus hints at the existence of a world generation. Here is how Tanzania's version of the Spirit of our Age was voiced to me in 2005 by Ndaki Munyeti, who grew up in a Sukuma town, earned a scholarship and now works in Dar es Salaam:

Kizazi kipyra means new generation, with more emphasis put on the new life-style we are acquiring from abroad. It started when *Bongo Flava* music took over, referred to as *Muziki wa kizazi kipyra*. It spread speedily and now involves other kinds of new generation, for example *nguo* [clothes] *za kizazi kipyra*, *professional za kizazi kipyra*. Even new technologies, for example IT, internet, are referred to as *kazi* [jobs] *za kizazi kipyra*. 'Kizazi kipyra' is now a very popular Swahili term. TV and newspapers mention it a lot, and it is even used in politics. *Kwa kifupi, mambo yote yahusuyo kijana wa kisasa wa kitanzania, kuanzia muziki, mavazi, kuongea na hata new professional* [In short, all things concerning Tanzanian youth today, starting with music, dress and even the discourse on the new professional] are treated as *mambo* [matters] *ya kizazi kipyra*. *Na sasa hata katika* [And now even in the] coming election, they are saying that *kizazi kipyra* should lead the nation: a good leader should know what a new generation needs!

He could have concluded with: 'Get my drift – the urge, the spirit of what is happening?' And significantly, I doubt that anybody's answer would have been 'no'. The Western reader partakes in his world generation. But as accessible as the urge of Tanzanian rap may be, perfectly transmitted through expressions such as *kizazi kipyra*, its symbolic reproduction involves multiple dimensions. This section tries to disentangle and outline the complexity in a diagram. The point of departure is to ask what symbolic conditions are necessary in order to speak of 'the new generation'.

First, the epithet questions the generation in charge and announces an important change: 'new' signals the possibility of human agency, thus countering resignation to macro-social processes of ongoing decline. Secondly, and of equal importance, especially in breaking with oral cultures oriented towards continuity with the past, is the term's intrinsic reference to time and to the transience of the present situation.

As I have described elsewhere (Stroeken 2005), the song *Ndiyo mzee* ('Yes, elder') by leading *Bongo* artist Professor Jay has been pivotal in raising awareness of people's complicity with the infectious play and corruption of their current leaders. Using the format of a play, the rapper comes on stage to intervene during a politician's rally and expose his

false promises, previously backed up by the audience through ‘Yes elder’ cheers. The song was given a lot of airtime and became a big hit in the national charts because of its long-awaited mockery of the political elite. Moreover, the lyrics centrifugally implicated the population of voters, especially the parents of those who make and enjoy this music. Since the late 1990s, many such hit songs have created the impression of a fairly homogenous mentality or episteme that has been detrimental over the last twenty years and allegedly turned the country, even the entire African continent, into ‘Bongoland’, the land of the cunning (*bongo* literally means brains). Comments in the sense of ‘Here’s Africa for you’ (*Na hii ni Africa* by Juma Nature) can be heard everyday on the streets and on the radio, in response to accidents, violence and insecurity. In this context, the listener is led to crave for a ‘new generation’, with the rapper being its first incarnation. Both male and (though to a lesser extent) female rappers represent the generation that is emerging from hiding and speaking out, confronting the population at large: ‘I open the gates for the new generation. There’s still a chance for those who were in hiding’ (from Prof Jay’s song *Jina langu*). However, to keep the audience interested in his cause, the rapper makes sure that he attests to a greater wisdom than that of his idealist forefathers, joking about the whole idea of saving a generation. *Ndiyo Mzee* therefore begins with the irony of a rapper impersonating a politician. Translated from Swahili, he assures his cheering audience: ‘I believe I was brought to save this generation. I am a politician blessed by God.’

An important parallel to intergenerational antagonism is found in the history of popular culture. *Bongo* rappers such as II Proud, Professor Jay, Juma Nature, Mwanafalsafa and Kwanza Unit relate the Tanzanian socio-political situation to trends spanning the globe when, in interviews and songs, they denounce the commercial, sexually explicit *kujigamba* (boasting) style dominating international hip hop. They claim that their own music promoters would also prefer the bands to skip the political message and concentrate on entertaining the widest audience. ‘Clap your hands’, Professor Jay (2001) ironically raps in the song of the same name, *Piga Makofi*. According to one verse: ‘This is important advice: let’s compete to see who’s best, but stay away, play elsewhere, you kids celebrating yourselves’ (*Hii ni fani iliyo muhimu: tucheze kwa kutamba, lakini kaa mbali cheza mbali watoto wanaopenda kujigamba*). Many hip hop tracks begin with a spoken intro addressing an imaginary, wide

audience. These generally stress that politicians and the media have been wrong to associate Tanzanian hip hop with lawlessness, *uhuni*. As the intro often warns, the language may be rough at times (e.g., sexually explicit, as in the hit 'Tanga what's up?' [*Tanga Kunani*] by Wagosi wa Kaya [2001]), but it serves the purpose of social criticism – in this case the decadence of elites and the lost glory of a legendary coastal town. Recurring themes include corruption, unsafe sex, domestic violence and the tinsel-like quality of modern goods and aspirations. Tanzanian hip hop is supposed to be different from US gangsta rap, whose appeal is attributed to consumerism and a political indifference not unlike that which Tanzanian rappers have witnessed pervading their country. The extreme African experience of multiple modernities, urban strategies and the AIDS pandemic privileges these artists when it comes to warning their peers in the West about the consequences of no longer caring about the larger political picture. *Bongo* artists in any case position themselves at an advanced stage in relation to the neo-liberal pragmatics that has governed Africa and the rest of the world since the 1980s.

The post-idealist episteme – in brief, 'anything goes' – appears not to be immune to criticism once it is brought down to its constitutive claim, which we know from capitalism: to integrate (market) any threat coming one's way. *Bongo Flava* warns about trivialising the harm in commodification and, far from imitating the idealism of hip hop pioneers, shows that the superior cynicism of gangsta stars is based on a mistaken belief, namely that contagion will lead to immunity. The idea of unsafe sex is never faraway. Going over a number of hit songs that have topped the charts since 2000, the listener becomes acquainted with liberalism's victims being left with little more than this belief in immunity through contagion: the bus touts, vendors and prostitutes living off the street. On the other side are the politicians living off the nation, and their voters accepting the bribes. In all these cases contagion – the bus-tout addresses his passengers with the fierceness of the surrounding traffic – is believed to immunise. The strategy already worked for the masters of survival featuring in the so-called 'Blaxploitation' movies of the early 1970s. Black reviewers condemned these films for their light entertainment, their tribute to hedonism and especially their antiheroes, the pimps and pushers of the hood. Now the parallel is obvious with US hip hop, which no longer combats but actually seeks contagion through the unlawfulness of the hood. The gangsta embraces capitalism to such extent that the white

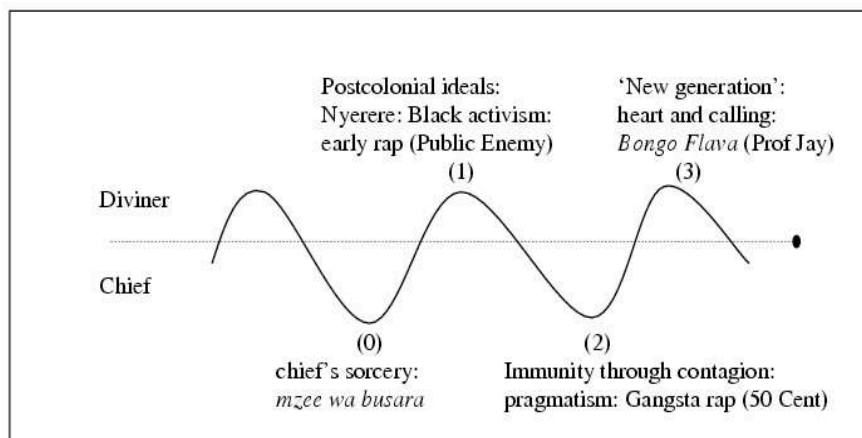
version looks harmless (a major theme of 'Black linguistics'; see Makoni et al. 2003). As the civil rights movement lost momentum, the time came for its antithesis. In hip hop, this meant the end of the emancipating message which began with rap's founding fathers, Public Enemy. The antithesis reached its peak a few years ago in the excellent album *Die rich or die tryin'* by American star 50 Cent. The logic of immunity through contagion appears particularly clearly in an interview including enquiries about his criminal past. 50 Cent replies that the real gangsters are George Bush and his posse, who are waging a war against another country for its oil reserves. But in the same breath he concluded: 'When I grow up, I want to be Bush.'² By accompanying his critique with its inverse, the speaker transcends any fixed position that could leave him vulnerable to suspicions of weakness. The 'new generation' in Tanzania differs, then, in its intention to do no less than disarm this streetwise strategy.

We should bear in mind that the immunising strategy is respected for its streetwise superiority. Although many rappers belong to the comparatively better-off classes of Tanzania, they sympathise with those 'friends of the ghetto' who cope with the harsh, postcolonial times by removing all physical protection and exposing themselves to the city's dangers. But they also seek to represent an advance on the gangsta's antithesis. To speak of a dialectical advance, however, there has to be continuity as well. The successive generations, with their respective epistemes, must belong to the same history. I suggest that gangstas such as 50 Cent invoke the mentality of the *Bongo* rapper's parents. The country's incorruptible founding president Nyerere, then, stands for Public Enemy's 'old school' rap, incarnating the grandparental generation. Artists such as Professor Jay (2001) and Mwanafalsafa (2002) cite Nyerere as having the exemplary 'heart and calling' (*moyo na mwito*) in the way of a visionary figure. A recent hit such as *Mzee wa Busara* (old wise man) by Wachuja Nafaka (2002) unmask travelling healers as sorcerers capable of destroying whole communities. Part of its success is to revive Nyerere's aversion to whatever arrested the country's development. Obscure village politics were one of his concerns after independence.

Going by their songs and interviews about national politics and the music scene, many *Bongo Flava* artists are seeking to make an epochal

² The interview was conducted by Pierre Slankowski and published in *Les Inrockuptibles* and in *Humo* (22 April 2003, p. 181).

advance. They do this through the double move of on the one hand opposing today's neo-liberal strategy of survival, which I have characterized as 'immunity through contagion' (see 2 in the figure below), while on the other hand keeping a distant affinity with nation-oriented ideals at independence (see 1 in the figure). They thus continue the dialectical antagonism which was initiated by the pragmatism of Tanzania's second postcolonial generation against the idealist first generation. One must think of the first generation's embodiment *Mwalimu* ('teacher') Nyerere as a revelatory figure, like a diviner or secular prophet, which the popular imagination tended to contrast with the predatory chiefs Mobutu and Idi Amin in neighbouring Congo and Uganda. (Popular imagination was influenced here by Nyerere himself, who virtually founded his reputation on abolishing local chieftainships.) These dictators prefigured the second historical generation, the immunisers, who have their predecessors too: quite surprisingly, the traditional chiefs, who achieved an amoral reputation in society for acquiring immunity against the dangers of sorcery by embracing sorcery. Hence, what looks like a dialectic towards critical consciousness, always privileging the later phase, may equally be seen as a mere oscillation between two age-old models of power: that of the chief (lower half of the table) and that of a revelatory figure (upper half). The mentioning of 'the new generation' transmits, if not a message, at least an urge and sense of urgency to the listener which is summed up in the following figure of a dialectic of three generations. I cannot judge to what extent a conscious strategy is involved here, but the song lyrics seem to derive their cogency from connecting *kin generations* (grandparents, parents, youth) to three *historical generations* (Tanzanians between independence and today), which themselves refer to three *world generations* (starting with Black activism and hip hop music since its inception).



The tragedy of the new: from cyclical to linear generation

For all the attractiveness of the rapper's urging of political engagement, it has something of the tragic too. A hierarchy is implied, with the most novel view supposed to top the rest. The only way to win over the audience and find peace of mind, it seems, is to provide evidence of progress. The centre of gravity of the rapper's message lies in the future (see the dot or eye in the figure), which, as we know, gives us nothing to go on. What happens to the mass of certainties accumulated in the past? Why not put our trust in this rare piece of foundation we have? As Feenberg (1999) argued, the student and environmental movements of the sixties were basically attempts to appropriate progress and to define it in their own terms. The point of no return had been reached after one's trust in the truths of the past had been sacrificed. The shift in attitude is not a measurable condition, but the bedrock of a cultural flow, external to communication because it is as obvious as the air we breathe. It refers to a basic sense of something missing, to the necessity for progress. In his trilogy *Into their Labours*, the writer John Berger has evocatively contrasted cultures of progress, which seek overall increase but postpone contentment, with peasant cultures, in which acts of survival satisfy without placing a burden on the future: 'Each act pushes a thread through the eye of a needle and the thread is tradition' (Berger 1979: xix).³ However, once it has been cut, the thread is hard to restore. Young Africans discover this after leaving school and finding a future that is not, after all, wide open.

Why did two Guinean schoolboys choose to die in the landing gear of a plane bound for Brussels? Their farewell note said they wanted to obtain higher education and become like Europeans. Ferguson (2002) claims that economic hardship made them seek membership of the 'New World society'. He is right that anthropologists should not obscure economic realities, as talk of cultural difference may. But what about the despair expressed in their suicide and accompanying letter? Economics obscures the drama of global cultural transmissions that destroy the very tools meticulously developed by cultures to create collective well-being. Most Tanzanian rappers are the children of middle-class civil servants, teachers and professionals, some of whom can travel abroad and come home with hip hop records. In the song 'Outside Inside' (*Nje Ndani*), the

³ I thank Michael Whyte for pointing out the link with John Berger's work.

band Gangwe Mobb (2002) identifies with these children and depicts them as living with the West on their mind: they live 'outside inside'. The literal meaning of *ndani*, inside, is 'in the stomach', though a more common, more figurative translation is 'in the heart'. Hence, the expression refers to the intrusive sensation of having the remote outside simmering deeply within oneself. The song opens with a spoken intro by an older man asking the young why something should seem more valuable to Africans if it comes from the outside. The man features as a wise elder, significantly addressing the rappers not as children but as grandchildren. He represents the connection with tradition, though he is also knowledgeable about modernity thanks to the second generation he brought up. This pivotal position allows him to defend some village values without seeming traditionalist:

Welcome, young people! Come closer and try some of my coffee. I called you over, because I know that many young people want to leave the country and migrate to countries like South Africa and America for a better life. But, my grandchildren, you will find poverty everywhere: inside [the country] and outside. Profit can be made everywhere. For example, your older brother working at the seashore with his canoe. For years he has been making a nice living. Haven't you heard of starving homeless people in Paris, France, or wherever? Trouble is everywhere. Americans too know poverty. I hope you will remember your brother fishing.

The man is impersonated, in a pleasant, comical voice, by one of the rappers. We are not learning anything about the elderly here, but about the new generation. Like the rapper, its members try to lure their peers into disconcerting reflections about popular aspirations. The Afro-modern have been *aphro-modern*: in love with modernity, like the beautiful goddess Aphrodite, who disliked her plain husband, representing tradition and anything already wedded. Is this not what sums up social processes in Tanzania such as the move from a decentralized village discourse to a nation-oriented discourse, the Pentecostalist break with the past, the dream of migrating to Europe and questioning the elder's status? *Bongo Flava* songs, in a counter-move, safeguard the position of 'the elders' in the village by depicting them as moral advisors, but also as revaluing their knowledge. One song from Professor Jay's album, which we will discuss next, denounces the witch-hunts victimizing the elderly.

To dream no longer of the remote outside is to break the spell of the former generation. What is that spell like? Schools, churches and newspapers developed a discourse about progress (*maendeleo*) and

autonomy (*kujitegemea*) that derived most of its cogency from antagonism with the past. If two years of fieldwork in a Sukuma village taught me anything, it was how cultural practices can not only hamper, but also contribute to a dynamic system of collective well-being, in which ritual practices provide a stronger sense of healing, the custom of bridewealth ensures greater stability in marriage and children's upbringing, practices of initiation strengthen village solidarity, mixed farming and herding limit intra-community conflict, and clan-formation supports social security. An explorative survey I conducted together with fieldworkers of a housing programme in Missungwi in 1997 indicated what most Sukuma villagers think a 'modern project' (*mradi wa kisasa*) expects from them: to reject traditional healing practices, bridewealth and initiation, to give up cattle-rearing, to free the household from interference from the clan, to count on one's friends, banks or development projects for financial security rather than on the clan, and to live in a nuclear household. A 'nucleating' tendency seems to characterize modernity in this part of Africa. The ideal is that of a nuclear family cutting its umbilical tie with clan, cattle and ancestors, to leave the past behind and focus on the future. Professor Jay (2001) raps about this change in his ode to the grandparental generation, *Salaam Bibi na Babu*, 'Greetings grandmother and grandfather'. The new generation he embodies appears to differ fundamentally from the neo-liberal urban young professional:

Still I remember father Kambarage Nyerere. The living God should give us light, since Tanzania today is full of confusion, ever more noise. Grandfathers and grandmothers are living today like forest birds (*tetere*). They suffer, and I can't see the future. I wait for a miracle, have no clue how we'll get out of the dark. Many people scorn initiation rites. They say that our traditions yield no profit. The African's origin is obscured. My dream is of it reappearing. If so, I will spread its message.

Initiation rites traditionally foster the bond between kin generations as well as between historical generations in the village. The initiated is said to partake of 'the Sukuma wing' (*inana lya kisukuma*). The novices are reminded of the long tradition they continue, by addressing the 'first ancestors' who invented divination, pottery, canoe-building, and so on. A nucleating force in Tanzania is seeking to cut the intergenerational bond. It seems that the rapper is attempting to revive that bond, rather than waiting for the former situation to return. By stimulating the listener's intergenerational consciousness, *Bongo Flava* eventually serves the

purpose of initiation rites. We notice this in the lyrics, in the intros explaining the message to a lay audience, and in the artist's identification with both young and old people. If the intra-clan solidarity proper to kin generations has declined, the conviction exists that solidarity can be retrieved at the level of historical generations. In *Nawakilisha*, 'I entrust', Professor Jay (2001) promotes the bond which he pictures as both interregional and intergenerational:

To the civil servants as well as to the 'sailors' [*masela*, friends] in the ghetto I entrust the elderly [*madingi*], the young and the children. Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, this is the command: without unity there is no path [*bila umoja hatuna njia*].

The tie with the past is evoked by reviving Nyerere's concept of 'unity' (*umoja*). Nyerere promoted Swahili to unite the East African region and wed its inhabitants to their nation. The reference cannot conceal the rapper's nostalgia, an awareness of something lost, shining through, yet the rapper also senses the expectation that a new alternative will be presented: a recycled tradition won't do. And thus the listener receives a glimpse of the doubts, of the darkness experienced by the artist, who, unlike his grandparents, has to rely on what lies ahead. Traditional and modern ways, the inside versus the outside of which Gangwe Mobb spoke, are not views engaged in healthy rivalry, allowing each other a place in the same arena and leaving the choice up to the audience (as in the famous Sukuma dance competitions). A hierarchy has been introduced between belief systems. Once time is conceived as a linear reality, the present and everything associated with it, such as modern influences, is supposed to encompass and transcend the past. That, I believe, is the background to rappers connecting 'new' and 'generation'. They may appreciate the cycle of kin generations, but they have no choice: they have been brought up in the linear logic of progress. Their only option to break with the negative mentality ruling the country is to construct historical generations and announce the arrival of a third generation that encompasses or does away with the former two.

Prefigurative and postfigurative Tanzania

An international survey by the sociologist Ruut Veenhoven (2005) ranks Tanzanians as the unhappiest people in the world (Zimbabwe is in second place). The trouble with the survey is that expressions of discontent can mean different things. The complaint discourse of Sukuma farmers,

traditionally underplaying their hand so as not to challenge fate, differs from the worries of jobless immigrants in town. Moreover, publicizing the impasse may be a way to retain an inner sense of well-being. What I believe Veenhoven's researchers recorded in Tanzania was – and it supports my thesis – is that a 'new generation' of Tanzanians is expressing their discontent with the present, while anticipating a better future.

This brings us back to Mead's essay. She distinguished three kinds of culture: *postfigurative*, in which children learn primarily from their forebears, *cofigurative*, in which both children and adults learn from their peers, and *prefigurative*, in which adults learn also from their children' (Mead 1970: 1). The sixties were society's difficult passage from the second to the third kind: 'in this new culture it will be the child – and not the parent and grandparent – that represents what is to come' (ibid.: 68). This is what Mama Nyanda meant by the new generation: we turn to our children to learn about the world out there. Although a certain cynicism could never be totally excluded from the words of Tanzanians who have seen many hopes crushed since independence, her intention was not disparagement but, I think, hope after recognizing in her son the sense of urgency she had observed twice in the births of earlier world generations.

Postfigurative culture may conjure up images of obedience and gerontocratic rule, but the idea of learning from the older generations primarily refers to a way of being in the world. Sukuma daily greetings are elaborate, involving names of the clans and kinship determinations through grandparental figures. These visibly generate a contentment that might be compared with the sensation of hearing a song or detecting a scent that carries rich memories, bringing home strong links to the distant past, and thus adding to this song or scent a level of significance that none of its objective qualities could explain. People draw pleasure from wearing bracelets which refer to specific ancestral spirits. The bracelets are called 'what has preceded' (*shitongelejo*). The diviner's term for the ancestor, whose presence has to be established for a given oracle to count, is the eye, *liso*. Without it, the oracle is worthless. The great advantage of this orientation in life, of an activity's gratification deriving from mere reference to the past, is that success is almost guaranteed, for the past is always there, given, ready to be actualized. But if gratification must derive from the future, the pressure increases: the practice must be original, giving evidence of liberation from the past – evidence of the

very thing that will tragically always characterize it too. The newly invented practices become not traditions but fashions, essentially transient, with less potential to sustain contentment.

Once stripped of their evolutionist tenor, I suggest that the notions of postfigurative and prefigurative be advantageously recast as the two poles of a continuum linking collective (epistemic) orientations to the past and to the future respectively. Mead's study bore witness to the radical switch in people's basis of trust. In her optimism, typical of the period, she omitted to add that 'new' is not necessarily better (and that children are not teachers). Symbolic innovation will not yield much well-being if the cause or sense of urgency of this innovation is extremely short-lived. Fashionable ideas reproduce a state of irony, or what Behler (1990) defended (without irony) as 'circumlocution'. The difficulty of *Bongo Flava* rappers is to sustain a sense of urgency while remaining ironical. But I have argued that they manage to do this anyway by redefining their relationships with other generations, as illustrated in Professor Jay's attack on the concept of 'the elder', *mzee*, the patron and patriarch in both national and village politics. The up and coming world generation exposes how the parental generation of politicians abused the traditional code of the elder (*mzee*) to command authority and have power ascribed to them. In brief, the rappers are the children of a prefigurative culture in the making: they are correcting their parents, telling them what doing the right thing is.

Rap songs have mocked the politician's abuse of the villager's *mzee* code to the extent that the Swahili word *mzee* has been replaced in street slang by the joking term *dingi*. The song with the same title by Wachuja Nafaka (2002) confronts elderly men with their cravings for nocturnal escapade, inebriation and their disinterest in the household. The rappers tell the older generations to sacrifice the immunity granted by the *mzee* code and instead become *dingi*, a joker, a liminal figure pivotal in youth's search for change. The Sukuma term is *guku*, which has always been used in greetings to address grandfathers as well as friends, and which merges rules of respect with the elder's sacrifice of authority for the benefit of the next generation. Other research will have to determine the extent to which these intergenerational distinctions and rapprochements are conscious strategies. But in practice, *Bongo Flava* artists meet the tough challenge presented to modernity of correcting its biased picture of the traditions it wanted to break with. The third world generation cannot

return to the traditions of a postfigurative culture, but it can improve the picture through a newly found sense of urgency, even if that hard-won sense never lasts long among members of the world community.

Conclusion

Intergenerational conflict has a long history in Africa and has existed in many forms. Youth revolt has played a role in political change for as far as we have been able to record (Ranger 1975, Last 2004). The far-reaching effects of modernity on the status and authority of male elders have been observed since the beginnings of colonisation and monetisation. Clearly, it is not these transformations that place the intergenerational at the forefront of current research: AIDS can destroy families, but the intergenerational is a big issue too in the rural areas of Sukumaland, where epidemic levels have not been reached. What, then, has placed younger and older Africans in the position of having to discuss their relationship?

Contemporary songs and ethnographic comparison together sketch the contours of a general mood shining through in varied discourses on diminishing care for the elderly, on neo-liberal pragmatics, on the violence of youth gangs, and so on. The discourses all recount a break not with one's past, but with the concept of the past, as a trustworthy basis for one's choices. The existence of a world community and its world generations means that those who belong to it have reached a point of no return, literally where return is no option – where the past engenders no sense of urgency. This raises understanding of the depths of Africa's postcolonial predicament, the dramatic choices and sacrifices it confronts. Whereas pre-colonial and colonial transformations were more the spontaneous outcome of many cultural influences, today's young are compelled to invent identities, such as that of a new generation with global significance. The freedom of expression cultivated by *Bongo* rappers is part of the process of invention. Their unique sense of the experiences underlying social change warrants optimism.

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